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ABSTRACT

To help determine why women are not more active political participants and to provide information necessary to design messages to persuade women to become more involved, a study examined factors that affect political involvement of Southern women. For a comparison between perceptual attitudes between politically active women and other groups of people, questionnaire and interview survey techniques were used to study attitudes of three groups: 28 members of the Acadiana Women's Political Caucus, 28 Optimist Club members (male), and 170 college students and residents of a Louisiana parish. The survey was followed by the development of a Q-Sort to measure attitudes about women in politics. For the Q-Sort, the college students were asked two questions concerning the requirements of political involvement and the type of encouragement they would need to become involved. Perceptions of the major inhibiting factors preventing Southern women from being politically active differ among the survey groups in this study. More traditional values, lower educational levels, and less employment outside the home appear to be the key explanations for the lower political participation by Southern women. The results of this study suggest a need for a public education program to increase political participation by Southern women. (Thirty-eight references are attached and a table and Q-sort are appended.) (ARH)

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Perceptions of the Politicalization of Southern Women

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to examine factors that affect political involvement of Southern women and to compare perceptual attitudes between politically active women and other groups of people.

The method of study included a survey (n = 212) of members of a women's political caucus, members of a traditional men's business group, and university students. Significant differences were found on several factors. The women's caucus group, for example, ranked factors of "time" and "money" significantly higher in importance than did the traditional male and student-solicited group. "Attitudes toward women" and "family influences" were found to be more important to the traditional male and student-solicited groups than the women's caucus group.

A Q-sort was then developed that included elements to measure attitudes so that messages may be designed to encourage women to participate in politics.

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Perceptions of the Politicalization of Southern Women

In a recent speech in Kansas City, Shirley Chisholm spoke of the need to involve more women in politics (1988). The former Congresswoman from New York has preached this message for many years. She has contended that the United States government needs greater morality and concern for people, and that women can provide such perspectives. Ms. Chisholm also perceived the barriers to politics to be greater because she is female than because she is black.

Many women are hesitant to become politically involved. Statistics indicate that Southern women are even less apt to become involved in politics than the national averages because of several key factors: they live in an area with more traditional values, they have lower educational levels, and they participate less in employment outside the home (Englebart, 1974; Karnig & Walter, 1976; Shortridge, 1987). Research consistently has shown that persons from the South are less likely to vote and participant in high-involvement political activities (Baxter & Lansing, 1983; Karnig & Walter, 1976; Boyd, 1968; Englebart, 1974). Lansing (1974) found that the lag of Southern women behind Southern men in voting behavior supports the belief that the women who live among people with more traditional values are less inclined to vote (p. 12).

Southern women may think of politics in outdated connotations. These authors content that Southern women have misconceptions about the necessary qualifications for political involvement and are too easily discouraged from entering politics because of local cultural, educational, and employment influences. Women should have access to positions of political influence. By having support from political parties and interest groups, women can affect legislation that is advantageous to them as a group and to society as a whole. The purpose of this study was to help determine why women are not more active political participants and to provide information necessary to design messages to persuade women to become more involved.

Review of Literature

Although women actually may be better suited for political office than men because of skills developed in the course of their daily lives, most women are reluctant to show an interest in politics (Trafton, 1984, p. 7). Reasons behind this reluctance include fear of the unknown, embarrassment in seeking power (Trafton, 1984, p. 7), and succumbing to the pressures of the socialization process by becoming politically passive (Welch, 1977).

Some obstacles women face are caused by women themselves. For example, women may be jealous of successful female politicians. They may think that women capitalize on their own inadequacies, or they may feel that women should not compete with men (Tochin & Tolchin, 1973, pp. 25, 92). Further obstacles may include insufficient time and the unavailability of child care (Wells & Smeal, 1974). Some political scientists blame the lack of female political participation on women themselves because few organize themselves, or participate in politics (Bourque & Grossholtz, 1984).

Other political scientists blame the problem on men. According to Evans (1981), for example, male biases may discourage female participation because most men have not been conditioned to allow women into the political arena. Men tend to see women as assets in terms of traditional qualities (Evans, 1981) and regard them as supportive rather than dominant (Carroll, 1979; Tolchin & Tolchin, 1973). As a result of the combined impact of sociological factors, women have been underinvolved at most levels of the political hierarchy. This problem is even greater in Southern states.

Two schools of thought have emerged to explain the lack of female participation in politics: the socialization process of women and sociological variables. The socialization process of women--that occurs when they are children--is one explanation (Baxter & Lansing, 1983). The other explanation of sociological factors--such as education, employment, income, race, age, and geographical region--act as inhibiting factors for female political participation (Hansen, Franz, & Netemeyer-Mays, 1976).

Socialization is important in a discussion of political behavior because it provides the norms, values, and role definitions that women and men carry into adulthood. This socialization process tends to direct women and men into socially-defined roles (Baxter & Lansing, 1983; Sapiro, 1983; Weitzman, 1979). Among the various aspects to socialization, some sociologist argue that even if women do not have full access to the political arena, they do have important influence in the private arena of the family, where their real power lies (Iglitzen, 1974; Sapiro, 1983; Turkel, 1980). The concept of "man being public and political," and "woman being private and apolitical," has created a dichotomy which is misleading as to the character and political potential of both women and men (Kay & Meikle, 1984; Sapiro, 1983; Siltanen & Stanworth, 1984). According to Manning and Turner (1986), the majority of research on the relationship between socialization and politicalization

"has focused on the differing socialization of the two sexes or on the behavior of women as a group as explanations for the low numbers of women in political roles" (p. 204).

A second group of behavioral researchers have suggested that a woman's political participation is affected by sociological variables (Baxter & Lansing, 1983; Carroll, 1985; Lansing, 1974; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Waite & Berryman, 1985; and Welch, 1977). For example, the best indicator/predictor of politicalization is education (Baxter & Lansing, 1983; Carroll, 1985; Jaquette, 1974; Lansing, 1974; Levitt, 1967; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Waite & Berryman, 1985; and Welch, 1977). Because many women faced discrimination in terms of a good education and subsequent high-paying jobs, they have failed to become involved in party politics (Welch, 1977). Women with higher academic abilities are more likely to plan continuous employment and select an occupation that is considered traditionally male, such as politics. Well-educated women are also more active at the "grass roots" political level (Baxter, 1977).

Milbrath and Goel (1977) found that the distinction between higher and lower occupational status groups produced inconclusive differences in political participation. There was a tendency, however, for higher occupational status persons to be active in politics. Kendrigan (1984) found that women are seldom employed at jobs which allow time off, thus making campaigning difficult. Income affects vote influencing and political contributions. Women with fewer assets have fewer opportunities to affect public policy by contributing to political campaigns in order to gain access to public officials (Kendrigan, 1984, p. 40; Goertzel, 1983). A positive correlation exists between urban residence and active political participation. This association may be a result of less sex-role typing of the higher socioeconomic status of urbanites over the status of rural dwellers (Milbrath & Boel, 1977, p. 106).

Blacks and other minorities tend to participate in politics at lower rates than whites. But once blacks have become politically active, they are more likely to vote than whites (Milbrath & Goel, 1977). Although blacks and whites at the extremes of the educational spectrum vote in comparable numbers, the participation by black Americans at the middle educational levels lags behind those for whites at the same level (Baxter & Lansing, 1983, p. 86). Participation for blacks peaks around the age of forty. This low political activity may be due to the political repression of blacks in the South during the last several decades (Milbrath & Goel, 1977). Geographical region has correlated with race in respect to women's political

behavior. During the 1950s and 1960s, black women from the North and West were more likely to vote than those from the South. Since the 1970s, the influence of geographical region has declined (Baxter & Lansing, 1983, p. 83).

Age can affect the responsibilities of women and their ability to be politically active (Connstanini & Craik, 1972). The lower level of political activity among 55-65 year old women may be caused more by their lower educational attainment, however, than by their age (Milbrath & Goel, 1977, p. 115; Lansing, 1974, p. 9). The most apathetic group of political participants are young, unmarried citizens. Women in their twenties and thirties--except for the college-educated--have show less interest in campaign outcomes (Baxter & Lansing, 1983, p. 45).

Research has shown that women candidates have perceived their greatest obstacles in seeking party nominations and elections to be lack of money, time, electoral and party support (Carroll, 1985; Lynn, 1981; Kenrigan, 1984, p. 40, Manning & Turner, 1986; Tolchin & Tolchin, 1973). Women also lack support from other women. One example of this phenomenon is the lack of support along gender lines regarding the national democratic ticket with Geraldine Ferraro in 1984. There is a tendency, known as the "Queen Bee Syndrome," for women who have reached high positions in areas traditionally dominated by men to be unsympathetic and unsupportive of the efforts of other women seeking similar positions (Baxter & Lansing, 1983, p. 132). This tendency refutes the basic assumption that women already politically active would be supportive of those women beginning to be active (Wells & Smeal, 1974; Trafton, 1984, p. 8). Other factors affecting political participation may include image, opportunity, ambition or interest, experience and political efficacy, and trust of government (Levitt, 1967; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Baxter & Lansing, 1987). Women, for example, may encounter resistance and discrimination in seeking high-level offices (Carroll, 1985). Political efficacy and political participation are positively correlated. Efficacy--a feeling that one's political participation can make a difference--tends to be low among women (Levitt). Trust of government can affect political participation and tends to fluctuate positively in good times and negatively in bad times (Milbrath & Goel).

There is a societal assumption that women are not as interested in politics and public affairs as men (Levitt, 1967; Sapiro, 1983). It is possible that women may have a greater interest in local issues, or some women may prefer to serve in local offices. This "interest" may be due to the competition for higher offices or a lack of desire to

pursue higher offices (Carroll, 1985; Constantini & Craik, 1972; Jaquette, 1974; Merritt, 1982; Sigleman, 1975). Among the Southern women who have achieved high political offices, several have been widows of Southern, Democratic Congressmen. The "political wife" may be more readily accepted in party headquarters than a woman acting on her own behalf (Gehlen, 1977, p. 308; Rossi, 1982).

Although the area of sociological affects on the political participation of women has been well researched, relatively little has been done to compare the attitudes of politically active women with other groups. In addition, if one assume that more women should be involved in all levels of political behavior, then additional research is needed to determine the most effective message strategies to involve more women in politics.

Method

In this study, questionnaire and interview survey techniques were used to study attitudes of three groups: (a) the Acadiana Women's Political Caucus (n = 28), (b) an Optimist Club (n = 28), and (c) college students and residents of a Louisiana parish (n = 170). The questionnaire and interview schedule were developed based on a review of literature and interviews with two Southern women who were active in politics. The survey was followed by the development of a Q-Sort to measure attitudes about women in politics.

The inhibiting factors identified for study were: educational level, employment, age, sex, and geographical residence, attitudes against political women, competition difficulty, family influences, knowledge, money, time, interest, desire for power, competency of other candidates, self-concept, and campaign issues.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the major inhibiting factors preventing Southern women from being politically active.
2. How do inhibiting factors compare between Southern women and women of other regions?
3. What approaches could be successful in increasing political participation by Southern women?

Survey. A non-probability, purposive sampling procedure was used to obtain respondents of typical groups. The women's caucus members were selected because they have overcome many of the barriers which inhibit most women from being politically active. The all-male Optimist Club members represented professional men's views from

traditional power controllers in their community. The college students and area residents were chosen because of their potential for political participation. This young, educated group had characteristics that would predict increased political activity.

To analyze questionnaire responses, the Chi Square for Independence was calculated to find differences that occurred between groups. A contingency coefficient Cramer's phi prime were also calculated. A probability level of .05 was set to indicate significance. See Table One for factors that indicated significant differences between the women's caucus and the men's and/or student-solicited groups.

The interview technique was chosen to gain in-depth information about women in politics from individuals who had terminated their political activity, were still associated with the political arena, or were peripherally involved in politics (n = 10).

Q-Sort. Two open-ended questions were asked of 170 students in a basic communication course: (a) What would it take for you to become involved in politics? (b) What would someone need to say for you to become more involved in politics? Responses were categorized according the factors influencing political involvement of women found in the literature. From their responses, a concourse of statements was developed, from which a Q-sort was designed (see Appendix A). The Q-sort reflected the inhibiting factors found in the literature plus some other concerns frequently expressed by the students (e.g. a need for protection from media). The response categories were included in the Q-sort: age, geographical residence, women's support of other women, time, employment, income, race, opportunity, motivation, electoral/party support, motivation, image, socialization, education, experience, political efficacy, trust of government. A balance of positive and negative statements was used.

The Q-sort measure can be used to determine types of individuals and their attitude structure related to political involvement. Once those attitudes are understood, those people wanting to involve women in politics will have a better concept of the types of persuasive messages needed.

Discussion

Sociologist and political scientists have long tried to explain why women do not have a propensity toward political participation. The explanations are important to political scientists, students, and women interested in seeking

political office. Two schools of thought have emerged to explain the lack of female political participation: (a) the socialization of women, and (b) sociological factors.

The socialization process, which occurs during childhood, attempts to explain why women and men are directed into socially-defined roles (Sapiro, 1983); Weitzman, 1979). Many women accept the notion that "a woman's place is in the home," and therefore, believe that politics is a subject of concern only to men. A group of behavioral researchers suggest that a woman's political participation is affected by sociological factors (Baxter & Lansing, 1983; Carroll, 1985; Jaquette, 1974; Lane, 1959; Milbrath & Boel, 1977). It is possible that a combination of the two schools of thought best reflect the explanation for the low levels of political participation of women, particularly in Southern states.

What are the major inhibiting factors preventing Southern women from being politically active? Some personal perceptions about the political arena that inhibit Southern women from being politically active differ between the survey groups in this study. The politically active women who are affected by the inhibiting factors find that "lack of time" and "lack of money" are the most important inhibitors.

For traditional males and students who are not as closely associated with these inhibiting factors, the "lack of time" and "lack of money" are significantly less important. Responses from the men and students suggest that other factors such as "attitudes against women," "family influences," and "competition" are more important in inhibiting women. The factors of "attitudes against women" and "family influences" prove to be the most important inhibiting factors perceived by the traditional male and student-solicited groups.

The interview respondents indicated that family influences, family pressures, knowledge, confidence, lack of commitment, and biases against women were the key factors that prevented women from being involved in politics. The interviewees suggested several steps that could be used to improve the political image of women: (a) being more visible, (b) improving self-concept, (c) increasing formal education, (d) receiving support from family and friends, (e) maintaining professional attitudes, and (f) striving for excellence.

How do inhibiting factors compare between Southern women and women of other regions? More traditional values,

lower educational levels, and less in employment outside the home appear to be key explanations for the lower political participation by Southern women.

Education is the best indicator or predictor of politicalization. The formally educated are more likely to be the future primary political participants. In Southern states, however, lower educational achievement by women--higher illiteracy rates and proportionately fewer women who graduate from college--inhibit women from becoming more politically active.

Through employment, a woman obtains a large field of social experience and improves her insight into social problems. Female homemakers may be considered to have less concern with politics and consequently vote less frequently. Professional persons are more likely to become involved in politics. Southern women have proportionately lower rates of employment outside the home than national averages. Southern women also have high rates of employment in positions traditionally held by women (e.g. retail sales, education, household service). Income has the greatest impact on activities such as vote influencing and political contributing. Southern women have fewer economic assets than other regions, and therefore, have fewer opportunities to affect public policy by contributing to political campaigns in order to gain access to public officials.

Persons from the South are less likely to vote and be a participant in high-involvement political activities. The lower levels of voting may be explained by the more traditional environment in which sex roles are slower to change than some other regions. The socialization process may account for the lack of political interest by many Southern women. Additional inhibiting factors for political participation for all women include: (a) the image of a female political participant is thought to "tarnish" the femininity of women; (b) many women are not afforded the opportunity to enter politics, and (c) women are assumed to have less interest in politics and public affairs than men.

Education and socioeconomic status tend to have equal importance in creating and maintaining political interest (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1968; Goertzel, 1983). In fact, many women encounter resistance when entering politics. Southern women may show less interest in politics or public affairs because of their more traditional orientations.

What approaches could be successful in increasing political participation by Southern women? A need for a

public education program is suggested by the results of this study. Because the survey groups differed significantly in some opinions about the lack of women in politics, education about the potentials and capabilities of women appears necessary.

The primary goals of a campaign to increase political involvement of women could include: (a) increasing the awareness of the importance of female participation in politics, (b) encouraging contributions of time and money in support of candidates and issues, (c) encouraging more women to apply for and accept appointive office or to run for elective office.

Five key target audiences appear useful for such a campaign: (a) high school and college students, (b) business professionals, both male and female, (c) political, community, and religious organizations, (d) potential participants, and (e) women who were previously involved in politics. These audiences should be least resistant to persuasive messages that encourage the increased political involvement of women.

The importance of the inhibiting factors to the individual groups affects the specific objectives and strategies for target audiences. The overall objectives of the suggested educational programs are to inform the significant publics about the positive contributions women can make to the political system and civic affairs. A program strategy should be interpersonally and event-oriented, rather than media-oriented. This study indicates that persuasive messages from people with whom the women interact directly will prove most influential.

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Appendix A: Women in Politics Q-Sort

1. Women are not as interested in politics and public affairs as men are.

2. I have a high interest in politics, and I am or hope to be actively involved in politics.

3. In order for me to become involved, I would have to have a chance at an important office.

4. In order for me to become active in politics it would take a lot of money.

5. In order for me to become active in politics I would have to know someone already involved.

6. Women in politics can really change things for the better.

7. Women don't support other women as well as they should.

8. I trust the federal government and our political system.

9. In order for me to become active in politics, the government would have to stop violating women's rights.

10. Women are more interested in politics for social good than are men.

11. In order for me to become involved, I would have to know the politician I am working for is honest.

12. Women are more interested in local politics than state or national politics.

13. There would have to be a candidate who is truly concerned with the ERA and the women's movement, for me to become involved.

14. Lack of electoral and party support is why more women are not more involved in politics.

15. Someone would have to show me that politics are fun and easy for me to become involved in them.

16. If I knew I would become famous, I'd be active in politics.

17. Having children restricts women from running for political office.

18. People who are economically independent have more political independence.

19. I would like to be politically active if someone taught me about the issues.

20. If it would give me a better career, I would become active in politics.

21. I would have to be paid well to actively work on a political campaign.

22. Blacks and other racial minorities tend to participate in politics less than whites.

23. I would be more likely to become active in politics if someone told me that a woman was running for president.

24. Today's young black people will be equally successful as whites in future politics.

25. Women in politics only represent other women, not their male constituents.

26. Men become involved in politics for power, while women become involved in politics to better our society.

27. I don't have what it takes to make it in politics.

28. More women should hold positions of political power.

29. Women don't know enough about party politics to succeed in politics.

30. Women lag behind in political participation because they were discriminated against in terms of a good education.

31. Women make better party workers than political office holders.

32. I would be more likely to become active in politics if someone told me that I'm a help they really need.

33. To be active, my private life would have to be protected from the media.

34. I accept women in politics more readily than the average American.

35. In order for me to become active in politics, someone would have to approach me and offer me a specific job.

36. Boys are more interested in war and politics than girls are.

37. To be active in politics, I would have to have more time.

38. The differences between men and women is because of the way we are raised.

39. If women hold themselves back, it is all in their own minds.

40. Women in politics are discriminated against.

41. Women are better suited to politics because they have better common sense than men.

42. Black women in politics are discriminated against even more than white women.

43. If women don't get involved in politics, it's totally their own fault.

44. I would be more active in politics if it wasn't such hard work.

45. I would be more active in politics if someone told me I was really needed and could do a lot of good.

46. Someone I really disrespect would have to be running for an important office so I would campaign against them.

47. Politics is a man's game.

48. A woman could become president of the United States of America.

49. For me to be more active in politics, I would have to marry a politician.

50. My best friend would have to be running for office and need my help for me to become active.

51. To be involved in politics, I would have to be able to make a difference.

52. Women can have as much control and authority as men.

Table One

Factors Inhibiting Female Political Participation
Comparison Between Women's Caucus and Other Groups

Factor	n	χ^2	C	Φ'
Equal Opportunity	212	7.45*	Ø.18	Ø.19
Money	149	15.12***	Ø.3Ø	Ø.32
Attitudes toward Women	149	3.69**	Ø.16	Ø.16
Family influence	121	5.67*	Ø.21	Ø.22
Interest in politics	141	3.67**	Ø.16	Ø.16
Desire for power	146	1Ø.84**	Ø.26	Ø.27
Self-concept	131	4.16*	Ø.18	Ø.18

*$p<.Ø5$
**$p<.Ø1$
***$p<.ØØ1$